

Investment and imagined identities

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Investment and Imagined Identities of Biliterate Indonesian Lecturers:
An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

Drawing on the application of the notion of *investment* to language learning, this paper reports on Indonesian educators' investment in learning a world language - English - and on the extent to which this investment helps construct their identities as academics. This exploratory case study primarily employs semi-structured interviews from five participants to probe their contextual backgrounds and learner histories and describe their efforts to become biliterate. The empirical evidence shows that these learners' increased awareness of their individual investments and imagined future identities play a dominant role in assisting them to be able to identify as biliterate individuals. Even though this was a small-scale study, our exploration of the five learners' descriptions of their investments and the results contribute to insightful theoretical and practical knowledge in the Indonesian tertiary education community, casting particular light on those Indonesian bilingual educators who have managed successfully to achieve high levels of English proficiency.

Keywords: Indonesian bilingual educators, *investment* to language learning, teacher identity

Introduction

This paper explores the experiences of five Indonesian tertiary educators who were invested in seeing themselves as more than balanced bilinguals, that is, as *biliterates* (Hornberger, 2003), individuals fully competent in two languages. A biliterate person is not only an individual who is proficient in two or more languages but also a person who can transfer knowledge from one language to another language; that is, to use a common conception, think at once in two languages. A bilingual, in comparison, is a communicator who is proficient in two or more languages. Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty, (2008, p. 2) emphasise 'the term does not always imply an equally high level of proficiency in all the relevant languages'. The paper heeds calls for empirical participant-based research in Indonesian education because it is under-represented in the global knowledge system (Adnan, 2014; Welch, 2012). Hence, this study aims to make a contribution to international knowledge through the reporting of findings relating to knowledge about biliteracy developed in Indonesia and, by extension, similar contexts within the Asian region. This under-representation of studies in Indonesian biliteracy and bilingualism is effectively due to its citizens' reported general lack of mastery

of a world language (English) (Paauw, 2009). However, some Indonesians have developed what May, Hill, and Tiakiwai (2004) call “balanced bilingualism” (p. 12), which is the ability to speak both Indonesian and English to a similar extent, but not necessarily to ‘transfer’ from one language to another. The literature suggests this balanced bilingualism opens spaces for biliterates to engage globally.

In addition, to further our identification of a clear need for research in this area, there are practical reasons for undertaking this research. These concern understanding the potential employability of biliterates. Clearly, implementing bilingual education involves responding to the demands of global employment opportunities where the ability to speak an international language is highly valued (Baker, 2011). This study is important, too, because the themes of biliteracy and/or bilingualism, identity, and language learning are emerging issues within Indonesian contexts, and there is a strong need for additional studies.

We argue that in Indonesian contexts the notion of *investment* in the mastery of an additional language is not only related to its use as a medium of instruction, but it is also crucial to identity construction – understanding oneself as a biliterate. To the Indonesian context we apply Norton’s (2000) suggestion that language should be understood in relation to socially constructed reality; it is not merely a neutral medium of instruction. Specifically, the term “identity” in the context of this study is seen as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). In relation to investment in language learning, Norton argues (2013, p. 6) that investment relates to “a meaningful connection between a learner’s desires and commitment to learn a language, and their complex and changing identity.” Similarly, Pittaway (2004) describes the tangible results of any investment-focused teaching and learning event as acknowledging students “for the complexity underlying their motivations, desires, and hopes for the future” (p. 216). Following Norton (2000), Andrew and Romova (2012) argued the term “investment” allows researchers to link current and potential learning and literacy performance to future identities. To extend these applications to our study, researchers’ understanding of investment in language learning can help them envision a proficient biliterate’s identity through his or her historic and social interactions.

The following section describes further literature that informs the study and establishes its theoretical framework.

Literature review

This study draws on an epistemology derived from a range of approaches to identity, all of which are applicable to the development of bilingual and indeed biliterate identities in Indonesia: poststructuralist notions of identity and language learning (Norton, 2000, 2013) and the future-oriented concept of imagined identities (Anderson, 1991; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Hence, the study draws on insights from a range of writing in the field of language acquisition, elucidating their application to the Indonesian context in new ways.

The works of Norton (Norton, 2000, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995), including the longitudinal study of how migrant women perceive their language learning experiences,

provide a useful prototype for the identity studies due to the poststructuralist emphasis on identity as being unfixed and in continual flux. Following Norton's research in Canadian contexts, the notion of identity has been reconceived as a flexible construct under continual negotiation and open to desire. Identity in relation to language learning had been viewed from different perspectives: discourse identities (McKay & Wong, 1996; Thesen, 1997), social identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Morgan, 1997) and cultural identities (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). These heterogeneous views of identity had predominantly been influenced by the different foci and loci of the research projects (Norton, 2000). In this paper, we apply Norton's emphasis on the fluid nature of aspirational and imagined identities to cases of second / foreign language learning among aspirational biliterates in Indonesia.

Studies of the negotiation of identities within bilingual and biliterate education produce depictions of not only national (or bi- or multi-national) identities but also local bilingual ones. Hornberger (2003), who investigated bilingual education in the Andes, claimed that bilingual education (and with it the emergence of biliterate communicators) can be seen as a way of constructing a national identity. On the other hand, in a Colombian context, De Mejía (2011) claimed that identity within bilingual education is more naturally constructed from indigenous perspectives rather than via national labels of bilingual programs. She argued that the national focus, which tends to homogenize cultural diversity, exists within local contexts. De Mejía suggested that the interplay between language borrowing and code-switching in biliterate contexts assists biliterate learners to construct social identities. These studies show that identity is envisaged in literature on bilingualism and biliteracy (as well as language acquisition) as multiple and hybrid (May, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). This concept of identity as hybrid, evolving, transferable and subject to contextual influence is applied in this Indonesian study.

In relation to language learning acquisition, Hornberger (2003) views the second language as being introduced either simultaneously or successively. She maintains that "simultaneous" exposure relates to the introduction of the second language at an early age, while "successive" exposure refers to the exposure to the second language at an adult stage. Both simultaneous and successive exposure require the presence of competent speakers for learners to interact with and to learn from. As we will see in the findings, this idea is relevant to our Indonesian study due to similarities in the circumstances in which the participants are exposed to the target language.

Language learners in the context where English is a foreign language tend to imagine their full participation with English global communities (Norton & Kamal, 2003). Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 5) used "imagined" in this sense (in the phrase "imagined communities") in his historical study of nationalism. Then Norton (2001), amongst others, imported it into language learning. Imagined communities are defined as "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Norton, 2013, p. 8) and for our Indonesian potential biliterates these are aspirational desires for identities at local, national and transnational levels. Andrew and Romova (2012) showed they can also be professional communities or other sites of aspirational belonging where a target language is used. In 2003, Kanno and Norton argued that the language learning in

classroom and school contexts transform the lives of students within such ideal imagined future communities. Both Kanno and Norton and Andrew and Romova share the idea that the learning foreign / second language involves individuals aspirationally envisioning their future ³¹es and operating communicatively within imagined communities. They are invested in language learning as a means of becoming functional biliterates and belonging to communities that at this stage can only be imagined.

Applying these concepts suggests that there is link between the efforts of Indonesian individuals to become biliterates with contemporary theories of identity construction. For this study, all participants answered the same set of questions although the researchers would prompt participants to give further comments on the following issues:

Q1: How did you learn English? (*Bagaimana cara anda belajar bahasa Inggris?*)

Q2: What is the most influential stage that influences on your English? (*Apa fase pembelajaran yang paling berpengaruh pada perkembangan Bahasa Inggris anda?*)

Q3: Why should English be used alongside Indonesian as the medium of instruction? (*Kenapa bahasa Inggris digunakan bersamaan dengan bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa pengantar pembelajaran?*)

Q4: How does English impact you personally and professionally? (*Bagaimana pengaruh pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris terhadap perkembangan karir anda ataupun anda secara pribadi?*)

Methodology

Context of study

The best way to understand foreign language learning in South East Asian contexts is to examine policy. There follows an extract from the implementation of Indonesia's Law of National Education System No. 23 (2003), Article 33, Paragraph 3: *Bahasa asing dapat digunakan sebagai bahasa pengantar pada satuan pendidikan tertentu untuk mendukung kemampuan berbahasa asing peserta didik* (foreign language can be used as a medium of instruction to support learners' foreign language abilities, first researcher translation). In addition, Higher Education Law No. 12 Article 37, Paragraph 3 reads: *Bahasa³ asing dapat digunakan sebagai bahasa pengantar di perguruan tinggi* (foreign language can be used as a medium of instruction³³ in higher education) (Higher Education Law, 2012). Both laws became the legal basis of the implementation of bilingual education to the Indonesian tertiary levels. The foreign language mostly used is English. Thus, many Indonesian universities implement bilingual / immersion programs. The five participants in this study were recruited from bilingual programs within an Indonesian higher education institution.

Participants

In its wider form, this research involved 66 participants, both lecturers and students from bilingual programs. For this short article, we present five¹³ lecturer participants who have an average on ten years' experience of bilingual programs (Table 1):

Table 1.

Participants of the study

Participant	Sex	Age	Educational background	Languages spoken
Narina	Female	40s	Masters	Javanese, Indonesian & English
Ningrum	Female	40s	PhD	Indonesian & English
Jarkowi	Male	40s	PhD	Indonesian & English
Sutimin	Male	50s	PhD	Indonesian & English
Fatiha	Female	30s	Masters	Indonesian & English

The reason for choosing these five participants as representatives of the wider sample is that they most evidently portray future hopes and aspirations regarding their academic roles that characterise the wider group of participants. Similarly, all five participants had experienced studying and living overseas and tell of their investment in becoming functional biliterates in their interviews.

Research method

This research applies an exploratory case study method. This qualitative study originated in fieldwork conducted from mid-August to the end of December 2013 in a provincial Indonesian university. This study aims to provide information on Indonesian educators who report being invested in being proficient in another language and wish to ²³ that proficiency to engage at an international level; that is, effectively become biliterate, able to transfer knowledge from one language to another language. This study is more descriptive than interpretive in that it focuses on “rich description of the phenomenon under the study” (Streb, 2010, p. 6) and does so in order to retell their narratives as imagined and emerging biliterates to the fore with their own terms of expression. This study is unique in that its conceptual framework draws on the investments and future and imagined communities of lecturer-learners’ in a nation beyond the conventional Inner Circle.

Data Collection Method

² Primary data were gained through semi-structured interviews of the five participants. These lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour each. The interviews were ²²ly conducted in Indonesian because of participants’ stated preferences on consent forms. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The translation of the transcriptions were done the first researcher and then verified by another competent bilingual, or rather, biliterate, researcher.

² All transcripts were sent back to the participants for verification of content and meanings. The participants’ verification is important to avoid bias and to give them power over how they are represented even though pseudonyms are used. The interviews were carried out from mid-August to the end of December 2013, but several contacts such as emails, phone calls, and text messaging were made until January 2014 and were used as additional sources of data.

⁸ Data analysis

The data was initially analysed using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which involved the data being thematically analysed and arranged following the procedures outlined by Attride-

Stirling (2001): we firstly read the entire set of data and then performed initial coding. After that, we identified and reviewed themes. Furthermore, we identified core themes from the available selective themes. Finally, the core categories were refined and articulated as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008) to achieve meaningful and theoretical categories that informed the findings and outcomes of the research.

Findings

Exposure to and investment in English

Participants in this study invested their effort and time in learning English through exposure to various activities. Four participants learned English at public schools, while Ningrum learned English at international schools. Narina and Sutimin were exposed to English for two hours a week when they were at secondary school, while Fatiha and Jarkowi had very limited exposure to English. These four participants recognised their limited exposure to English during their schooling periods. Table 2 describes participants' exposure to English from high school to postgraduate level.

Ningrum stated that primary and secondary schools were significant loci for her English development. She began to acquire English at the primary school level. She then convinced her family to allow her to continue her studies in international secondary schools where English was a medium of instruction for teaching subjects. After completing high school, she continued on to earn a Bachelor of Political Science in a public university, with Indonesian as a medium of instruction. She had limited exposure to English reading materials and occasionally attended a weekly community English workshop. With her level of English proficiency, she decided to work part-time as a teacher of English in a training institute. She stated: "To learn other languages better is to teach them to others." She struggled to balance her academic work and part-time English tutoring. It seemed that while earning her bachelor's degree, maintaining her English level was difficult since English was not used as a medium of instruction.

Unlike Ningrum, the other four lecturers declared that the most influential context assisting them with enhanced exposure to English was during their bachelor degree studies. All participants reported the necessity of studying for their Masters in English speaking nations in order to function communicatively within their university communities. Narina spent two hours every day for four years studying English at a private language institution. In addition, she was involved in community language learning for two hours every weekend during her undergraduate years. More importantly she observed "the intensive training truly gave me an opportunity to improve my language skills and understanding other cultures." Similarly, Fatiha acknowledged: "I got involved with a lot of activities in English when I was in undergraduate studies such as language clubs and after school intensive training." Fatiha also founded a community of English language learners where she practised her English. In addition, Sutimin participated in a number of extra-curricular student organisations and language activities as well as music clubs where he used English during his bachelor studies. He commented, "the six months' intensive English training program help improve my English significantly."

Table 2.

Exposure to English

Contexts	Bilingual educators				
	<i>Narina</i>	<i>Ningrum</i>	<i>Jarkowi</i>	<i>Sutimin</i>	<i>Fatiha</i>
Secondary School	Limited exposure	High exposure	Very Limited exposure	Limited exposure	Very Limited exposure
Bachelor degree	One semester exposure to English through various activities & basic to advanced intensive English course	Maintaining English through part-time teaching	As a subject for one semester Personal reading efforts	High exposure to English through communities of learners	One semester exposure to English through various activities & English in youth groups
Post-graduate studies	Direct contact with native speakers of English in Australia	Direct contact with native speakers of English in the UK	Exposed to some native speakers of English in the Netherlands	Direct contact with native speakers of English in Australia	Exposed to some native speakers of English in Japan

For Jarkowi, personal efforts in reading assisted him to learn vocabulary, grammar and writing. He asserted:

I keep reading similar authors of English books, particularly biographies of successful political leaders, to learn new vocabulary and grammar. Then I borrow the books from library, and sometimes I buy some books from the nearest bookstore from my home.

In addition, he was also involved in a number of academic and extra-curricular activities during his bachelor studies. One event he participated in was the students' scientific paper competition because he learned not only writing skills but also public speaking skills for Indonesian and English. For the sake of his English proficiency, he also took a number of IELTS and TOEFL sample tests independently.

For their postgraduate studies through overseas scholarship programs, Ningrum, Narina, and Sutimin went to the UK and Australia while Jarkowi went to the Netherlands and Fatiha went to Japan. As a result of participants' investment in English, they attained good levels on standardised tests on their return to Indonesia. Narina and Sutimin gained IELTS scores of 7.0, while Ningrum and Fatiha attained 7.5. Jarkowi achieved a TOEFL score of 550.

Those levels of English proficiency enabled them to continue their studies overseas where they could further improve their English skills.

Both during their postgraduate studies and during their time as lecturers in Indonesia, learning another language enabled these increasingly proficient biliterates to gain an understanding and appreciation of other cultures while retaining their local culture. Sutimin recognised the impact of mastering English: "I gain both [cultures], being part of my communities and I can also engage with global communities." In their current work, they report using English-Indonesian medium instruction assists them to be consciously more inclusive and more understanding of the importance of biliteracy for their own students. Sutimin said "open-minded attitudes aid everyone to accept diverse ways of lives and different points of views." He asserted that the open-minded person can "accept the diversity of situations so everyone can be more progressive in that situation." Sutimin claimed that open-mindedness assists him to "build up a tradition of appreciation particularly appreciation of other points of views." This observation shows his effort to learn another language and another culture on one hand, and maintain his own language and culture on the other. Not only was he linguistically invested in the language of his host countries, but also in its culture.

In all cases, the lecturers report they were invested in intensive training and that they held conscious affinities to imagined communities. Their efforts helped enhance their English skills. These extracts indicate that participants' investment in English led to perceived increases in their proficiency and appreciation of other cultures. More importantly, mastering English as an international language assisted them to become exposed to and engage with global communities of English. Also they reported being able to participate in academic forums where English was used as medium of instruction.

Imagined identities

Lecturers envisioned bilingual modes of instruction as potentially transforming their academic lives as biliterate speakers and writers of English and Indonesian. They expressed their expectation that they would have mastered both languages because they were taught in a bilingual program; and speak positively of the impacts now that they do teach in one. Although all five lecturers received postgraduate degrees from English-medium universities overseas, they claimed that they still continued learning English so that they could use it as the medium of instruction at appropriate levels where every student they encounter would be able to understand and gain from their instruction.

Fatiha stated that she has the "desire to improve my writing ability particularly writing for academic journals," indicating a desire to belong to an imagined academic writing community. Teaching in bilingual programs, she argued, "triggers me to learn more about my weaknesses" particularly since her self-learning related to her "desire to communicate fluently in English." For Fatiha, improving her English skills, particularly writing, is "a never-ending journey." Even though she studied in English-speaking countries for her postgraduate studies, she realised that "it has not been enough to become an eloquent writer in English, because English is not my first (language), nor is it frequently used outside campus."

The other lecturers, Jarkowi and Ningrum, commented that a bilingual medium of instruction offered them the opportunity to "re-learn" how to become good speakers and

good writers in both Indonesian and English; that is, to know how their students might feel, as future imagined biliterates. They possessed similar motivations: to address the limited availability of bilingual textbooks through their presence as biliterate educators and two-way communication resources. Jarkowi had the desire to write bilingual books that can be used for his students and others at the university level. Ningrum also had the ambition to be a good writer, at least “to write bilingual materials that are available in English and Indonesian.”

Mastery of English helped these lecturers to learn and imitate the ways and patterns of academic writing in the articles and teaching materials they read, and hence join their Imagined communities, characterised by proficiency in academic writing (Andrew & Romova, 2012). Understanding key strategies for academic journal writing was relevant to the lecturers' roles. Therefore, one way to learn while teaching was to use the pattern and structure of academic papers that were widely accepted in their own field, as Narina articulated:

it helps me to learn the pattern of academic writing from published papers, some papers I used for teachings often I imitate the way they used certain words and sometimes I try to create similar pattern.

Narina expressed the importance of becoming a role model for her students, family, and communities and for her this aspect of identity is dependent upon her mastery of another language:

I want all my works and experiences to be integrated and relevant to my life. My motto is “dare to inspire.” I want to be a role model for my own family, my relatives, my students and community.

Narina's expectation was to show how English impacts her and others. Sutimin made significant comments on how the mastery of English had impacted his academic positions: “I had a chance to get some papers published in journals and presented papers in international conferences.” He asserted: “mastery of English or other international language is a must for academics, even though it is hard for us [Indonesians] since we do not use English very often outside teaching hours.” The professional identities of all five lecturers were impacted by their mastering of English and all concur that it is crucial to the maintenance of their identities as biliterates and those of students they may teach in the future.

All five participants demonstrate that mastering English allowed them to become competent speakers and writers not only in English but also in their first language (Indonesian), which reflected how their identities were constructed relative to visions of themselves as belonging to an imagined community of biliterate Indonesians. More importantly, this reported data shows lecturers imagining themselves to be more professional and global scholars through their publications in journals they regard as “accredited” and disseminating their papers in international seminars or conferences.

Discussion

From the findings, it is apparent that most participants, while exposed to English in secondary school, began to invest in English language learning as undergraduates and consider themselves to have “learned” the target language at adult stages. What is a significant feature of both successive and simultaneous exposures is that each set of opportunities embody

chances to encounter and engage with speakers of English in educational institutions and in communities in their home countries and overseas. Jarkowi, Fatiha, Narina and Sutimin learned English intensively and successively while Ningrum, during her primary and secondary schooling, had simultaneous exposure to Indonesian and English (Hornberger, 2003) although she had started to acquire English at the elementary school level. This paper suggests that regardless of whether learners – in this case learners who become educators – acquire biliteracy successively or intensively it is the young adult and university years that consolidate their desires to become successful communicators in both languages.

Participants also envision language learning as help to construct their identities. This finding corroborates the ideas of Norton (2013) and Norton and Toohey (2011) who suggested that language learning and identity are constructed via social and cultural connections based on a desire for affiliation. In other words, having a desire to belong – to a club, a group, a university, a professional organization, a community of interest – enhances investment in gaining the tools needed for membership; in this case, English competency. Participants in this study have invested in episodes of language learning that occurred in their home countries and overseas. This process qualifies them not only to be seen as learners of English, but also as academics, researchers, writers, and increasingly as members of a desired community. This finding further support the descriptions of May (2001) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) of identity as multiple. Biliterates hold multiple identities that coexist within given contexts. Alternatively, one or another of the aspects of identity can predominate depending upon the linguistic and cultural resources in those settings. With their English abilities, the participants were able to expand their opportunities to establish networking with international academic communities during their overseas studies.

The present findings also seem to be consistent with the concept of imagined identities as a function of investment in learning (Norton, 2000; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Narina, for example, imagines herself as being the role model in the certain communities she belongs to. Through these imagined identities, English is considered to be “the language of possibilities” (Norton & Kamal, 2003, p. 309) for Indonesian educators because they can transform their identities and lives in the communities they wish for in their futures.

Conclusion and limitations

The paper describes the histories and perspectives of Indonesian biliterate educators who have managed successfully to achieve proficiency in English. The exposure, investment, and imagined identities can lead to effective agential learning, enhancing the target language ability. Further, language learning helped shape their aspirations, desire to belong to imagined communities and attain imagined identities. This small-scale naturalistic study shows this is true for Indonesian academics who study in English-speaking countries and who manage to become proficient bilinguals. It may be true for those who do not employ English outside school settings provided they are invested in biliteracy during their university years.

In their interview narratives, participants revealed their identities are multiple (May, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and those of professional academics, aspirational global

scholars, and increasingly successful bilingual writers desirous of belonging to an accredited community. This observation about emergent biliteracy in the educational trajectories of Indonesian lecturers is consistent with Norton's (2013) assertion that identities in language learning are socially and historically constructed. ²This research was carried out with teachers who are successful learners of a foreign language in an Indonesian university context and the findings provide a new perspective on biliteracy as a component of professional identity, particularly in Indonesia and arguably applicable to other developing countries.

Despite the small scale of this research and our process of sampling based on pre-existing links among the five participants, the description of the cases in light of the conceptual frameworks offered by investment and imagined community may contribute to insightful understandings of biliteracy in the Indonesian tertiary education community. Despite these limitations, this research applies 'investment' in an Indonesian cohort to bilingualism (Baker, 2011). We acknowledge that the results of the interviews do not include descriptions of the difficulties, problems, struggles, and negotiations involved in the process of the participants' learning English, studying abroad, trying to belong to their imagined communities and establishing their identities, and acknowledge that this limitation, due to the choice of interview questions, delimits a full portrait of emergent biliteracy. Clearly, future research needs to explore the factors that play other roles in acquiring an additional language, particularly those of gender, socio-economic status and access to opportunity. Future research also needs to be conducted within larger samples in multiple sites in Indonesia. Further, multiple settings would contribute data with broader population samples and offer more comprehensive evidence. Such studies would complement and extend the findings suggested in this paper.

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